

# Fat stomachs 'raise risk of pancreatic cancer in women'

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*Source:* <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.med.diseases.cancer/2008-07/msg00022.html>

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  - *Date:* Wed, 16 Jul 2008 01:00:05 -0400
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<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2302912/Fat-stomachs-raise-risk-of-pancreatic-cancer-in-women.html>

Fat stomachs 'raise risk of pancreatic cancer in women'

By Ben Farmer

Last Updated: 12:06AM BST 16/07/2008

Obese women who carry much of their excess weight around the belly are 70 per cent more likely to develop pancreatic cancer, a study has found.

Researchers believe that obesity could increase the risk of pancreatic cancer, one of the most difficult forms to treat, by affecting insulin levels.

The study published in the British Journal of Cancer found a link between waist-to-hip ratios and the cancer while monitoring more than 138,000 post-menopausal women for seven years.

Dr Juhua Luo, of the Karolinska Institute in Sweden, who led the research said: "We found that the risk of developing pancreatic cancer was significantly raised in obese postmenopausal women who carry most of their excess weight around the stomach.

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"Obesity is a growing and largely preventable problem, so it's important that women are aware of this major increase in risk."

Of the American women surveyed in the study, 251 developed the cancer and when other risk factors such as smoking and age were factored out, the disease was far more prevalent in the obese than those with smaller waist to hip ratios.

Dr Luo said: "We know that carrying a high proportion of abdominal fat is associated with increased levels of insulin, so we think this may cause the link between obesity and pancreatic cancer."

Pancreatic cancer is the tenth most common cancer in the UK, with around 7,400 cases diagnosed each year. Difficulty in diagnosing the disease

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means few cases are spotted early and only two or three per cent of sufferers are still alive after five years.

Previous research has found smoking, a diet rich in fat and sugar and hereditary pancreatitis, or inflammation of the pancreas, all raise the risk of the cancer.

Dr Lesley Walker, director of cancer information at Cancer Research UK, said: "Pancreatic cancer is associated with particularly poor survival, so it's crucial that we learn more about how to prevent the disease.

"About a quarter of all cancer deaths are caused by unhealthy diets and obesity and it's important that people are aware of this risk."

Around 3,800 women were diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2004 in the UK and in total there are around 7,000 deaths a year.

The study is the latest to suggest links between fat on the abdomen or pot bellies and disease.

Health researchers have traditionally used the overall body mass index, calculated as the weight in kilograms divided by the square of the height in metres, to gauge obesity.

However, recent studies have suggested that the distribution of fat can be important in predicting disease, with pot bellies particularly likely to trigger illness.

A study from University of Texas last year found those with fat bellies as measured by their waist-to-hip ratio were at far greater risk of heart disease than those whose fat was spread around the body.

The ratio is calculated as the waist measurement level with the belly button, divided by the hip circumference at the widest point.

For men, the ratio should ideally not be over 0.9 and for women, 0.85.

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